Letter from Taizé

Bimonthly 3.50 FF 5 October – November 1998

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28 DECEMBER 1998 — 1 JANUARY 1999:
THE YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING IN MILAN

Opening our homes and communities

Preparations for the Young Adult European Meeting continue, not only in Milan, but in all the countries of Europe. In every country an effort is being made to encourage preparation in depth. Such preparation should help us to live out the Pilgrimage of Trust at Milan as a strong experience of prayer and openness to others, and also as a commitment to support moves towards reconciliation at home.

In Poland, to give just one example, more than two hundred points of preparation have been set up to take registrations and to suggest ways of preparing, with times of prayer and sharing.

All through the summer, the young Italians present in Taizé have warmly invited the people they met, giving a sense of the warmth of the welcome which is being prepared in their country.

WELCOMING FOREIGNERS

"In the parishes of my city", says Sara, "the meeting will be a completely new experience. We live forty kilometres north of Milan, in the direction of Switzerland. Our region is quite well-off, heavily populated, with a lot of towns next to each other. Welcoming differences, mixing with people of different languages, cultures, and traditions is not always straightforward. For a long time the province of Varese has been a place of immigration: people come to live here especially from the south of Italy, and more recently from further away too. There is a risk that mistrust and fear of difference could strengthen regionalism and close us in on ourselves, between home and work. So for many of us, there is a great desire to experience this meeting by daring to open our homes and our communities to people we do not know. That will open us to the world; it will also help us to discover what we can receive, as well as what we can share from our own resources.

We do a lot of work with groups of young people, and also with volunteer groups where a lot of young people and adults are involved. The preparation and the experience of the meeting will help us to put our energies together and to orientate them towards a common goal. That will also be a sign of hope

→ 2/2

THE MEETINGS OF
YOUNG ADULTS IN TAIZÉ

Images of the summer

Which images of the summer at Taizé are most worth remembering?

The calm and joyful common prayers, the silence and the meditative singing that continue in the church long into the night? The young people laden with their rucksacks on Sunday morning searching among the fifty buses for the one which is to take them home? The anthill of the day of arrival between the parking area and the welcome places for the different languages, which suddenly quietens down for the prayer at 5.30? The morning Bible introductions with the brothers, in preparation for personal reflection and sharing in small groups? The places of silence, away from the crowds?

Or should we remember rather the groups coming from far away, like the seminarians from China, the young people from Cambodia and other countries of Asia, those from nearly all the countries of Latin America, the Africans, the many groups from Russia who set out leaving behind them a situation of upheaval, or those from Romania or Bulgaria? It would be impossible to list all the countries that were represented, since there were weeks when there were more than sixty of them. There are groups of people who do not mind making long and uncomfortable journeys of up to two days and two nights to come from the extremities of Europe, from Portugal, the three Baltic countries or from Scandinavia. When everyone arrives, things are arranged quickly and calmly only because three hundred young people offer their help for several weeks and see to the coordination of the different teams that do all the practical tasks.

The summer is the time when the largest number of young people from other continents are able to come. Every Saturday, there is a kind of celebration as they welcome everyone with songs and dancing and explain all that they are involved in in their countries. The dynamism and courage to which they bear witness encourage everyone

→ 2/1

Summer...

and widen our image of the communion of the Church.

These colourful images express the summer's richness and diversity. But its depth is not obvious in the same way. Yet the attentiveness of the gatherings, the peacefulness of everything, and the kindness of people for each other give a hint of it.

At times there have been television cameras around during the summer. For many people, television is the only way to discover what is happening on the hill at Taizé. In this way, pictures have been broadcast in different countries, in Russia, in Germany and in Scandinavia, and finally in France with a live broadcast of the celebration on 6th September.

A large number of Church leaders came to join the common searching and the prayer: two cardinals from Rome, a number of Anglican bishops from India, Australia, and New Zealand on the way to the Lambeth Conference, bishops from the Lutheran Church, including the Bishop of Uppsala in Sweden with the twenty-five members of the cathedral chapter, and a bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church. One French bishop came with a hundred and fifty young people from his diocese; another presided at the eucharist on the day of the life commitment of a young German brother in the Community.

The simplicity of the daily life, the liveliness and the prayers in church made for a broad welcome. But at the same time, a real commitment is expected from everyone: the invitation is to discover a sense of waiting on God in the silence and the commmon prayer, and to open oneself to others in listening and service. This availability, together with inner peace, allows us to discover the centre of gravity which can inspire a life in all its dimensions. And so a way forward becomes apparent: Christ is not just a fleeting visitor who stays only for a few rare moments, separated from ordinary life as though the two were incompatible. He can be the fundamental point of reference which, once it has become clear, can support the vitality of a whole lifetime.

Saint Ambrose, who was Archbishop of Milan at the end of the fourth century, had a special concern for the witness to sharing that Christians are called to give. This is an extract from one of his sermons:

When you give to the poor, in fact it is you who benefit from it. (...) "Do not say, 'I will give tomorrow'", God tells you (Prov. 3,28). But if God will not even accept someone saying "I will give tomorrow", how will he tolerate it if you say "I will not give at all?"

Besides, it is not your goods that you distibute to the poor: it is their own that you are giving back to them. For you are the one who has taken for yourself what was given to all for the benefit of all. The earth belongs to all, and not only to the rich; but it has been monopolized by a small number of people. When you share, far from displaying your great generosity, you are paying your debts. That is why the Scriptures tell you to incline your ear to the poor and to pay your debt by giving your response to them in a spirit of gentleness and peace (cf. Sirach 4,8).

Milan...

which we would like to help those we welcome discover too. I think it will be important for us not to stop just with the search for 'two square metres in a warm place' in families. We will have to dare to live out this as an adventure which will commit us much more, leaving aside the comforting rhythm of family, work, and social events. It will be essential to experience different ways of sharing and praying. And we will let ourselves be taken hold of by the enthusiasm that our guests will bring!"

"I work as an educator", says Daniela, "in a crèche for children of all kinds of origins, especially non-European, who often do not have legal papers. I realize every day how difficult it is for a foreigner to begin a new life far from their own culture, their family, in order to escape misery. The people of Milan are used to seeing foreigners everywhere, begging at crossroads, waiting at traffic-lights ready to clean car windscreens, in the houses of rich people working as domestics without papers... We are so used to saying 'No, thank you', to pretending not to see them... and we forget that behind each face there is a life, a story which it would be well worth knowing. That is why I am happy that we will be welcoming visitors in our town. Foreigners will be coming into our houses, enlivening our streets, but above all opening a space in us, widening the horizons of our spirit, and enlarging the limits of our humanity. We will give each other a lot through the times of prayer and sharing. And afterwards, the foreigner at the crossroads, at the traffic lights, in the houses of elderly people will be closer, less foreign, and for us a bit more human."

THE READINESS OF THE MILANESE

The people of Milan have entered on the most concrete period of the preparation of the welcome. They are looking for families to offer hospitality and making contact with individuals and groups who will be able to share their experience or their searching. During the month of September, a large number of meetings will be held in different sectors of the city. Some brothers of the Community, a dozen young people coming from Taizé, as well as some Sisters of Saint Andrew are visiting the parishes. At the heart of this preparation, a daily prayer has begun at the Church of Saint Ambrose in the town centre.

The diocese of Milan is showing a great readiness and a strong desire to do everything to make the welcome go as well as possible. In the pastoral letter which he wrote for the year 1998-1999, Cardinal Martini emphasized the i portance of the prayer that will be perienced together: "A very large nu ber of young people from the whole Europe are going to teach us somethi about silent and prolonged prayer, d ing the Taizé meeting which they will experiencing in Milan after Christm Already we would like to thank th for the help that they will bring us enter into ourselves and to adore t Father in silence."

Interviewed recently on video, Cardinal Martini, Archbishop of Milan, spoke about how he sees the European Meeting in his town:

I think that this European Meeti will be an event of prayer which w teach us how to pray. Taizé has a gre tradition of praying with young peop I hope that the city will be transforme in a sense, into a city of prayer.

Europe is looking for unity. Up un now, this has been a unity based on th economy, on money. But Europe cann stay united unless it has a spiritu unity. So I see how important this mee ing is for favorising this spiriual uni which has its root in prayer.

Taizé has a double vocation. The fir is to teach a large number of your people how to pray, to teach them co templative silence, to hold themselves i waiting before God, to pray from th Word of God. The second is the ecu menical vocation: to teach young peop of different languages, cultures, and re ligious denominations the sense fraternity, to teach them how to searc together. And I would add anothe mission: that of going beyond conflic of helping towards reconciliation th young people who come with exper ences that are often very painful, such a those of eastern Europe, of of Ex-Yugos lavia. It is good that these young peopl can discover what reconciliation is, an so can anticipate a Europe reconcile and in peace.

Our welcome should take as it model that of the Bible, which is full o stories about hospitality, beginning wit the story where Abraham welcomes th presence of God in his tent, right up t the Epistles of the New Testamen which urge us to welcome each othe and especially those who are sent to an nounce the Gospel.... We will be able t say, I hope, about the young people they came among those who were thei own family, of the same faith, and they were really welcomed with love.

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YOUNG ADULT
EUROPEAN
MEETING
Milan
December
1 January 98/99

Young Adult European Meeting in Milan

28 December 1998 — 1 January 1999

At the end of this year, tens of thousands of young adults from throughout Europe will be welcomed in the city of Milan, Italy. A new stage in the "pilgrimage of trust on earth," it will be the 21st European meeting prepared by Taizé.

Taking part in the European meeting means preparing oneself to work for reconciliation on all levels, in the man family as well as with those ound us in our daily lives.

Being welcomed in families and par-es helps us to discover, in a tangible ay, that peace and trust are possible ong people of different backgrounds.

Prayer with others and times of group aring root our search for meaning in a mmunion with God.

Meeting witnesses to a commitment behalf of others, in neighbourhoods d parishes, helps us to take on respon-bilities when we return home.

PREPARATION:

For the European meeting to go well, ch participant must take part in all at is proposed. An attitude of atten-on and openness to those from other ountries is vital.

The time of preparation should pro-ide a foretaste of the meeting itself, so at those who register know what they re committing themselves to, so that ey can consciously decide to take part all the prayers and meetings. The reparation takes place on a regional asis through meetings and prayers hich will be organized from Septem-er on.

The following questions can help this reparation:

What motivates me to set out towards ther Christians who are far away? Am ready to take a similar step towards hose who are nearby?

Who can I set out with? Who do I know around me who would be happy o take part in this experience of prayer, sharing and openness to others? How can I propose it to other people beyond my circle of friends and acquaintances?

Can I take a time of silence now and then to review my life, to pray simply while listening to God?

The pilgrimage to Milan calls for an inner attitude of openness, of attentive-ness to others. How can I begin by open-ing myself to those who need me here and now?

The starting-point of the pilgrimage is the local community. How can I look for ways, from the very beginning of the preparation, of maintaining and deepening links with different groups and local Christian communities?

PRACTICAL DETAILS

Arrival: Monday morning, 28th December 1998 between 7am and 12 noon. **Departure:** Friday mid-afternoon, 1st January 1999

General programme: Participants will be welcomed by families and local church communities throughout the city and surrounding region. Morning prayer each day will be in one of the churches of the neighbourhood where you are staying. Then meetings in small groups with other participants and with local people. Each day — midday and evening — there will be two common prayers for all participants of the meeting together. In the afternoon, workshops on various themes.

Accommodation: Simple conditions. Bring sleeping-bag and lightweight mattress. Accommodation will be with families and in parish buildings.

17 to 29 year olds:
— those who can help, as animators in parishes or as team-leaders for practical tasks, or in the choir group, need to arrive on Saturday 26th December, between 8am and 3pm. (Arrival not possible on 27th December.)
— those who arrive on 28th December choose one of three ways of taking part:
+ participation in the life of parishes of the city (this is the main group);
+ helping in a team that has a practical responsibility (meal distribution, church team, choir group), while still participating in the life of a parish.
+ for those between 17 and 29 years old only, it is possible to spend the five days in silence, with a Bible introduction every morning.

16 year olds may come to the meeting only if accompanied by an adult over 18, with each adult accompanying no more than four 16 year olds. Arrival: 28th December — not before. All take part in the main group during the meeting: "participation in the life of parishes of the city".

Adults over 30: the European Meeting is intended for young adults under 30, however a few adults over this age can also come, in particular if they are leading groups of young adults. We ask older adults (over 45) to consider sponsoring a young person to come from a church, chaplaincy or school in their area, instead of coming themselves. Adults over 30 all participate in the main group, and arrive on 28th December (not before). Those who cannot accept the same simple accommodation conditions as the young people and who need a "real bed" please mention this when you register.

Families with children, and people with a disability who need special accommodation should contact Taizé, — best by telephone in October or November — to arrange this.

The contribution to costs expected from each participant will be given exactly in November. For young people from Britain, it will be in the region of £40 for the whole meeting. As well as the hire of meeting-halls and equipment, this covers all meals and a public transport pass.

Register by 1st December at the latest to the address below. Further information will be sent in November to those who register earlier.

Travel:

- **from Britain**: for special coaches (£115 return) to the meeting contact "Skyliners", Flaval House, Caldwell Road, NUNEATON, CV11 4NB. Tel: (01203) 325682 / 328410; Freephone: (0500) 481111; Fax: (01203) 354626

- **or** investigate flights: "Go", Air UK", etc.

- **from other countries**:
write to Taizé, for information:
"European Meeting", Taizé Community,
71250 TAIZE, France.
tel: (+33) 385 50 30 02
fax: (+33) 385 50 30 16
email: meetings@taize.fr
web site: http://www.taize.fr

Isn't it unjust that God extends his love and forgiveness to those who have done much evil as well as o those who have tried to do good?

We can leave justice behind by going in two directions--in the direction of injustice or in the direction of generosity. Jesus told the story of a man who, without being unjust, did not do what was just. An owner of a vineyard went out early one morning to the town square and hired day-workers, discussing their wages with them. Throughout the day, until the last hour before nightfall, he kept recruiting those he found. When the time to pay the wages came, surprise: everyone received the same amount, the workers who came at the last hour as well as those who began in the morning!

It is understandable that those who worked hard the whole day reproached the owner for the unjust way he rewarded his workers: "The men who came last have done only one hour's work, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat" (Matt 20,12). But the owner defended himself from any wrongdoing: didn't they get exactly what was agreed upon? And isn't he free to do what he wants with the others? "I choose to pay the lastcomer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with what is mine? Why should you be envious because I am generous?" (vv.14-15).

Thinking about this parable, Isaac of Niniveh, a Christian born on the Persian Gulf in the seventh century, wrote: "Do not say that God is just. (...) If David calls him just and fair, his Son revealed to us that he is above all good and kind. He is good to the ungrateful and the wicked (Luke 6,35)." God leaves justice behind in the direction of forgiveness and generosity.

Why are we so upset to see God showing goodness indifferently to the good and to the wicked? Someone once imagined how the story of the vineyard owner might continue. The next day he went out looking for workers, but no one showed up. He only found some in the evening. They had learned their lesson: why should they work hard all day if they could earn the same wages in one hour? When it is taken seriously, the Gospel of God's generosity upsets the normal order of the world. It calls forth other motivations than hope for a reward or fear of punishment.

Encountering Christ invites us to selflessness; it calls us to distance ourselves, like God himself, from "what is only just." For in fact, it is not just that, in another parable, an elder son has to share his half of the inheritance with his brother who has wasted his own portion by living riotously (Luke 15,11-32). It is not just to forgive. But Jesus calls this gospel injustice "surpassing justice" that opens the gates of God's Kingdom (Matt 5,20).

If Christ came "not to judge the world but to save it" (John 3,17), why do we still speak of judgment?

The word judgment comes from the prayers of the o pressed: "Judge me, Lord; defend my cause against the mer less" (Ps 43,1). Judgment is not feared but desired. It mea that God puts things back in their place by coming to help t poor and exploited, by setting a limit to the arrogance of t proud. Waiting for God's judgment means having the ho that the course of events will not end in absurdity. The victi and the executioners are not on the same level, because G "collects tears in his wineskin" (Ps 56,8). In order that no su fering and no attempt to love may be lost, God "repays ever one as their deeds deserve" (Ps 62,12).

That is why, from the psalms down to the Magnificat Mary, God's judgment is celebrated: "Let the nations rejoi and sing, for you judge the world with justice" (Ps 67,4). "Go scatters the proud-hearted; he pulls down princes from the thrones and raises up the lowly" (Luke 1,51-52). Even in ou own century we have witnessed such upheavals, the fall of t rannies.

Would we use God's judgment as a pretext to threaten an condemn those whom we think are deserving of God's wrath According to the apostle Paul, exactly the opposite is true. Rec ognizing that God alone knows the heart of each person keep us from judging one another. He writes, "Why judge you brother or sister? (...) All of us will have to stand in front o God's judgment-seat. (...) Each of us will have to give an ac count of himself to God" (see Rom 14,10-13). Paul does no mention "God's judgment-seat" in order to threaten but rathe to free us from useless burdens, mutual reproaches an condemnations. All human judgments are only partially just since they are mingled with desires for revenge or calculated cowardice. Fortunately, the court of last resort is God, who is light with no shadow of darkness (1 John 1,5).

The thought of a coming judgment has sometimes led be- lievers to judge themselves harshly, and even to sink into despair. This harshness, which can disguise itself in pious clothing, is a deep and serious misunderstanding. In reality, it is a form of refusal. Wanting to be our own judge instead of letting Christ come is one way of clinging to ourselves. Here we should listen again to Saint Paul. He writes, "It is of no importance to me how you or any other human court may judge me. I will not even be the judge of my own self. (...) It is the Lord who is my judge" (1 Cor 4,3). The certainty that our only judge is the Christ who loves us gives surprising freedom.

Two Questions About God's Justice and Judgment

MEDITATING ON THE WORD
NOVEMBER

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Mt 5:1-12

1 SUN ALL SAINTS
Jesus said: Happy are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Happy are the merciful, for mercy will be shown to them.

Jn 10:1-10

2 Mon Jesus said: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Ep 4:17-32

3 Tue Let yourselves be made new in the attitude of your minds and be clothed with the new self, which is created to be like God in justice and in holiness of the truth.

Is 42:10-17

4 Wed The Lord says: I shall lead my people by a road that is unknown to them. I shall turn the darkness into light before them.

Jm 1:17-27

5 Thu James writes: Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can give you life.

Dt 7:7-8

6 Fri Moses told the people: God set his heart on you and chose you, not because you are more numerous than other peoples, but it was out of love for you that the Lord delivered you from the land of slavery.

Ga 6:1-10

7 Sat Bear each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

Lk 20:27-38

8 SUN Jesus said: God is not a God of the dead but of the living; for him all people are alive.

Lk 18:18-23

9 Mon Jesus told someone: You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.

1 Co 1:10-13

10 Tue May there be no divisions among you. Be closely united in mind and thought.

Jn 1:9-18

11 Wed The Word became flesh and lived among us. From God's fullness we have all received.

Heb 10:19-25

12 Thu Without wavering, let us hold fast to the hope we have, for the one who has promised is faithful. And let us seek to stimulate one another in love and and goodness.

Is 50:4-9

13 Fri God wakens my ear every morning to listen as a disciple.

1 Co 7:29-31

14 Sat Paul writes: From now on those who buy something should live as if they did not possess and those who use the things of the world should do so without being engrossed in them. Because this world as we know it is passing away.

Lk 21:5-19

15 SUN Jesus said to his disciples: You will be persecuted because of my name. But make up your mind not to worry about how to defend yourselves, for I shall give you words and wisdom.

Jn 3:16-18

16 Mon God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

Lk 19:1-10

17 Tue Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus as he passed. Jesus said to him: "Come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today." And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.

Col 1:15-20

18 Wed God wanted all his fullness to dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile all things to himself.

Jude 20-21

19 Thu Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

1 K 8:22-40

20 Fri Solomon prayed: Listen, Lord, forgive and act; deal with every person according to all they do, since you know their heart — you alone know the heart of everyone.

Jn 14:1-3

21 Sat Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God, trust also in me.

Lk 23:33-46

22 SUN The criminal crucified next to Jesus, said to him, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Ps 1

23 Mon The person who finds their joy in God's law is like a tree planted by the water, which bears its fruit in season and whose leaves never wither.

1 Jn 4:16-21

24 Tue This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Jn 11:1-45

25 Wed Jesus said: I am the resurrection. Whoever believes in me shall live, even though they die. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

Mk 9:30-37

26 Thu Jesus said: Whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

Ep 5:8-14

27 Fri You are light in the Lord. Live as children of light; for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

Pr 4:18-27

28 Sat The path of the upright is like the light of dawn, whose brightness increases to the full light of day.

Mt 24:42-44

29 SUN ADVENT
Jesus said to his disciples: Stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Mt 4:18-22

30 Mon St ANDREW
Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

JOHANNINE HOURS

1 KINGS 3,4-15

In a dream, the Lord offered the young king Solomon the gift of his choice. Aware of his lack of experience and his limits, the king asked for "a heart to understand how to govern your people, how to discern between good and evil." God then made him understand that in asking for wisdom, he had found the key that would unlock all the other doors as well.

In the ancient civilizations of the Middle East, wisdom was first of all practical intelligence, the "common sense" necessary to succed in life. But very quickly in the Bible it took on a religious meaning: a wise person is one who walks along the ways of God, who is able to discern what God wants and put it into practice. And this wisdom, which is the subjective side of God's plan, can only come from God himself; it is a gift. When they try to achieve it by their own cleverness alone, human beings go astray in the illusions of a false autonomy and a magical omnipotence that leave them empty in the end.

It is not by chance that at the same time, a sage was setting down in writing a story in which a woman and a man, instead of listening to God's voice, stole the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 3). The basic choice offered to human beings is always the same: to centre everything either on oneself or on God, to attempt to be one's own source or to welcome everything as a gift. In the language of the Bible, "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord," in other words an attitude of respect before the unfathomable Mystery at the heart of life (Prov 9,10). Solomon understood that he was only a servant of the God of "great generosity" who wants to bestow everything on human beings. The king's limits were therefore no longer an obstacle to the fulfilment of God's plan, since when God encounters a heart that is open and willing, he can use what seems worthless to lead us towards the fullness of life.

- What aspects of the contemporary world make us forget that life and wisdom are gifts to be welcomed? How can we bear witness in this context to a God who is a source of generosity?
- What indications can I find in this story for dealing with situations when I become aware of my limits?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

DECEMBER

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Ws 3:1-9

1 Tue Like gold tested in a furnace, God purifies those who love him. Those who are faithful to him will dwell with him in love.

Mk 9:38-48

2 Wed Jesus said: If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, then in truth I tell you, they will certainly not lose their reward.

Lk 12:22-31

3 Thu Jesus said: Seek first God's Kingdom, and all other things will be given to you as well.

Ph 2:1-11

4 Fri Taking the nature of a servant, Christ became as human beings are. And he humbled himself still further, remaining faithful to the point of death, and death on a cross. Therefore God has exalted him, and has given him the name that is above all other names.

Ga 2:15-21

5 Sat Paul writes: The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Mt 3:1-11

6 SUN John the Baptist came as the prophet Isaiah had said: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight."

Jn 15:15-17

7 Mon Jesus said to his disciples: I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because everything I have learnt from my Father I have made known to you.

Lk 1:26-38

8 Tue Mary said to the angel: I am the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.

Ep 2:4-6

9 Wed Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sins.

Mk 10:13-16

10 Thu Jesus said: Let the little children come to me, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

Lk 17:3-4

11 Fri Jesus said: If your brother wrongs you seven times in a day and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent", forgive him.

Lm 3:22-26

12 Sat God's compassion is renewed every morning; his faithfulness is great. It is good to await in silence the salvation of the Lord.

Mt 11:2-15

13 SUN Jesus said of John the Baptist: He is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you to prepare your way.

Zp 3:14-18a

14 Mon Your God is with you. God will quiet you with his love and dance with joy for you.

Ac 4:32-34

15 Tue All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but they shared everything they had.

Si 30:21-25

16 Wed Trick the cares that weigh upon you, console your heart, chase sorrow far away, for sorrow is no use to anybody.

Lv 19:33-34

17 Thu God says: Love the foreigners among you as you love yourselves.

Mk 10:17-30

18 Fri Jesus said: No one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, together with persecutions, and, in the age to come, eternal life.

Rm 12:9-13

19 Sat Paul writes: May your love be sincere, cling to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection.

Mt 1:16-21

20 SUN An angel said to Joseph: Mary will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

1 Jn 2:24-28

21 Mon Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you. Thus you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

Mt 10:38-39

22 Tue Jesus said: Anyone who gives their life for my sake will find it.

Dt 30:11-14

23 Wed God's Word is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

Mk 12:28-34

24 Thu Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. These are the two greatest commandments.

Jn 1:1-18

25 Fri CHRISTMAS
The Word was in the world and, though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. But to all who accepted him he gave the right to become children of God.

Mk 6:45-52

26 Sat St STEPHEN
When they saw Jesus walking on the water, the disciples were terrified. But at once he spoke to them saying, "Have courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

Col 3:12-17

27 SUN Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. The Lord has forgiven you, do the same in your turn.

Lk 6:46-49

28 Mon Jesus said: Whoever comes to me, listens to my words and acts on them is like someone building a house who digs down deep and lays the foundations on rock.

Ga 2:19-20

29 Tue Paul writes: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

Mt 13:44-46

30 Wed Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; they hide it again, and in their joy sell everything they have and buy that field.

Ezk 36:24-27

31 Thu The Lord says: I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you.

JOHANNINE HOURS

JOHN 2,1-12

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

At the beginning of his gospel Saint John places an event which might seem commonplace: a marriage celebration in a small town in Galilee. In the Bible, however, the image of a wedding feast has symbolic value; it expresses the coming of God's Kingdom in fullness (cf. Isa 25,6; Matt 22,2; Luke 14,15; Rev 19,9). But here the most important thing is missing, the wine that rejoices the human heart. Jesus will provide this wine, and in an amount far beyond what is necessary, showing in this way his identity and his mission.

What enables this revelation to occur is the intervention of the mother of Jesus, the woman who collaborates with the man in order to bring God's plan to fulfillment (cf. Gen 2,18). Her practical intelligence and her compassion lead her to entrust the situation to her son, with a trusting heart which does not even require an explicit request.

Here as sometimes elsewhere in the gospel, when he senses a demand made upon him Jesus' first reply is apparently negative; he establishes a certain distance. This is because he looks beyond a simple act of kindness and sees his "hour" looming on the horizon: the moment he must make the total gift of his life in order to create an unbroken communion between God and humanity. His hesitation shows us that what is at stake in the situation is much more significant than anyone can imagine.

His mother does not hesitate, however, but addresses the servants with words which evoke the formula with which Israel ratified the covenant with the Lord on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19,8; 24,3.7). An image of faithful Israel, Mary acts as an intermediary between Christ and the others. She prepares the ground for the blossoming of Jesus' "glory" (v.11), the Presence of God who has come to fill the jars of purification with the new wine of the Kingdom.

- What steps and what attitudes on our part enable God to enter situations in order to transform them?
- What dead-end situations do I want to entrust to God?

Echoes from the Continents

Colombia

The challenge of peace

Jorge from Bogota, capital of Colombia, ent three months at Taizé. Here are me extracts from the testimony he gave ring a meeting:

"I am studying industrial design, but I end part of my time working with the shops' Conference of Latin America. My main commitment is concerned th one of the big challenges for the uth American continent, the challenge peace. Colombia is caught up in a iral of violence connected with the ormous inequalities that reign in the ntinent. This violence is especially ob- ous because of the presence of gue- las, who are gaining large numbers of cruits among young people. They often ganize kidnappings among the more aelthy people of Colombia in order to ain money.

In 1992 I took part, with a group of eventeen young people, in starting a oject to oppose this violence. After a me of training, I now go regularly to roups of guerillas to share my experi- nce as a Christian, my faith, and my ope for a possible life without violence. his project has been enlarged since 1996 include the whole of Latin America, aining young people to go and meet ands which, most of the time, are rmed.

What I have discovered at Taizé is ove all the real meaning of meeting ith others. Coming from a country here 96% of the population are Cath- lics, it is very new for me to meet young eople from different origins and cul- ures. Little by little, the trust which eigns here is allowing me to discover hat through each new person I meet, it is he face of Christ that I am finding. I real- e how important relationships of trust nd listening are in order to build up eace."

Sudan

Relieving the suffering of the innocent

Several years ago, a group of seven vomen from Sudan arrived on an unex- pected visit to Taizé. They wanted to pray with us and to share with us about he difficult situation their country was acing. They were concerned especially bout the children and young people, and hey asked if it would be possible for us to welcome in Taizé small groups of young people from Sudan. They believed that by coming to Taizé, Sudanese young people would be helped to return to their country in order to help those who are in need. By meeting young people from other parts of the world, who are also searching for simple solutions to the difficulties they face, the hope of the young people of Sudan could be renewed. So far, two groups of young adults have come to Taizé and returned to their country, and a third will be arriving soon.

Of course, in light of the present situation, one of the questions that constantly comes up is: what can we do to alleviate the suffering of innocent people?

The last group of young people from Sudan who stayed with us in Taizé thought that perhaps it would be possible to create a place of welcome for children who live in one of the camps for displaced people near the capital, Khartoum. Many people who live in southern Sudan have moved north in an attempt to flee the famine and the armed conflict. When they arrive in Khartoum, they are placed in camps, where often there are no vital services, for example, no schooling for the children, no electricity, water or medical assistance. These young people have built a house of dried earth where they can welcome children during the day. There they organize educational activities for the children, have a simple prayer and offer some food. (This project is being supported from Taizé through Operation Hope.)

During recent weeks, with the news that arrives from Sudan, our communion with these young people has grown by means of fax messages or telephone calls, made as often as possible. In Taizé during the common prayer there is a prayer for Sudan almost every day. One of the last times we called, one of the young Sudanese said: "Because of all the messages we have received from Taizé, we feel that we are not alone. We feel sustained in our dificulties. We have also understood that we must do something ourselves for our people. Thus, we have decided to leave for the south of Sudan and help those who are suffering because of the famine." Consequently, several young people left for the south of Sudan to help the sick, feed the children and help in whatever is needed.

Soon a young man from Italy, who has helped in other difficult situations in his own country, will be leaving to stay for several months with these young people in Khartoum and in Wau in the South.

Brazil

Days of trust

Paolo Alfonso is a small town in the north of the state of Bahia, on the banks of the river So Francisco. It is the administrative centre of the hydro-electric production of the river, which supplies energy to all the north-east of Brazil. One thousand six hundred young Brazilians took part in the meeting organized in the town by the Brothers of Taizé who live in Brazil. All the young people were offered hospitality by families. Even when fifty-five young people arrived at midnight after their bus had broken down, in less than one hour they had all been given

places to sleep in families, including some families which had not offered to provide accommodation beforehand. People's desire to welcome young people in their homes was so strong that too many families offered, and it was necessary to console those who were disappointed because there were not enough people for them to welcome.

The meeting took place in a vast new exhibition hall. The common prayers in the evening were the heart of the meeting. They were peaceful and very beautiful. A big open hall had been arranged with cheap materials. A choir of young people led the whole assembly, so that the singing was full and sustained. The Saturday evening prayer especially was like a door open to God.

On Friday and Saturday morning, the young people divided up into sixteen different parts of the town. First there were morning prayers, animated by young people, and then the participants visited people who were suffering, in prison, hospitals, shelters etc. In the afternoon, in an atmosphere that was both relaxed and serious, there were Bible studies, testimonies about prayer and Christian commitments, interspersed joyfully with singing and meetings in small groups. The meeting finished on Sunday morning with a march of one hour through the centre of the town, ending in the cathedral square, where the Eucharist was celebrated, with about three thousand people participating.

Echoes from the Continents

Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Art of Reconciliation

Anna from Sarejevo describes what she discovered at Taizé.

"Coming to Taizé was my first step towards the miracle called reconciliation. Wherever you look, whatever you hear, there is a sound of peace. And that was what I most needed after more than two years living in Sarejevo under the siege.

Four years have passed since then, and I feel that the warm welcome of all the brothers and the friendship of many dear people I meet here each year helps me to heal the wounds caused by the unjust war. The presence of prayer leads towards the presence of God. That is a fact that opens the heart to hear and understand people's needs. And afterwards it leads us to take some action according to those needs. The Community, by its way of life, shows us a way of living out that faith.

During the first months of the war, which I spent in the basement, hearing a number of shells killing my fellow-citizens, I chose not to hate. I knew that this is the only way to stay alive in the deep sense of the word, and also to help others to do the same. That was some kind of resistance to the evil around us. For me it was such a normal attitude, even though I spent some time asking God why all this was happening to us. We were attacked, and we were the victims of somebody's desires. So we all felt that this was not fair, and that in justice the world ought to come and help us. After four years we realized we do not live in a just world. Now we have an unjust peace in Bosnia.... But real peace is something to l established in our hearts!

That is the lesson I learned in Tai last year when a group of Orthodox Ser came. I didn't expect that meeting wi "enemies" would be such a painful thi for me. But it was! The fact that they di n't show any sense of guilt for what ha pened in my country and Croatia an their opinion that everybody is guilty f this war filled my heart with bitterne After so many years of isolation that w the first contact with "them". And thought that I had nothing to say. But o of the girls among them said that only as a girl from Sarejevo, had the right say anything against their opinion. that moment all the bitterness was gon I realized that she was a girl like me, wit the same desires and needs. They we all young, and we started to speak abo music and other simple things that ha happened since the divorce of our cou tries. We broke isolation by simple talk!

Talking about simple things, and esp cially telling about our different religio and cultures helped us to understan each other and never, I repeat NEVER, t think about the war again. If you kno and respect your religion you will respe others in their needs. God is our Fath and he loves us! In Taizé you can feel a learn that very easily. It is a special pla where you can learn the art of reconcili tion which is so necessary for a norm and decent life.

Letter from Taizé

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